

Vermont State Hospital Procedure			A25a
VSH Visitors Procedure - INTERIM			
Replaces Interim version dated: 9/17/10		Updated: X	Effective date: 10/27/2010
Interim Procedure authorized by the VSH Executive Director			9/15/2010

PURPOSE: To allow for visitors to the Vermont State Hospital in a manner that is welcoming and provides for hospital security and patient privacy. (Please see *VSH Hospital Policy: A25*).

PROCEDURES:

I. Visiting the Secure Residential and Treatment Areas

- A.** All visitors to the Secure Residential and Treatment Area (any person not a VSH employee, or authorized BGS staff) will be directed to the Admissions area for Visitor Check In.
- B.** Designated Nursing or Admission staff will provide for Visitor Check In, escort to and from the secure residential and treatment area, and Visitor Sign-Out. Nursing Check In staff will carry a pager obtained from the Admissions Office.
- C.** No more than four visitors per patient are allowed at the same time. Exceptions to the number of visitors may be made by the charge nurse.
- D.** Visits by children under the age of 18 must be pre-approved by the patient's treatment team. Any approved visitor under the age of 18 must be accompanied and supervised at all times by a parent or guardian. VSH staff will not be responsible for supervising visiting children.
- E.** Visits will be conducted in designated areas. Generally, interview rooms or the general dining area are available for patient visits.
- F.** Patients are free to receive visits from anyone unless the attending physician or designee, in consultation with other members of the patient's treatment team, has determined and documented in the medical record that a visit from a particular individual, or visits in general, present a likelihood of harm to the patient or others (*see VSH Levels of Autonomy and Supervision Policy: B14, for additional information regarding limitations on patient visitation*). In addition, visits with certain individuals may be prohibited by a court order. Patients have a right to refuse visitors.
- G.** Individuals who appear to be under the influence of alcohol or other substances, or who are using loud, abusive, or vulgar language may be denied permission to enter the secure residential and treatment area. Individuals who engage in behavior

deemed to be disruptive, including those who use loud, abusive, or vulgar language before or during a patient visit, may be asked to leave the Admissions area or the secure residential and treatment area at any time.

- H.** Whenever an individual has been denied permission to enter the secure residential and treatment area, or if a visit has been terminated based on an individual's unacceptable conduct, Check In staff shall notify the charge nurse or Nursing Supervisor, and also shall document in the Visitor Log the reason the individual was turned away or asked to leave.
- I. Pre-Approved Visitors:** A list of Pre-Approved Visitors will be maintained in Admissions. Pre-Approved Visitors will have pre-printed badges available in Admissions. The list of Pre-Approved Visitors shall include representatives of:
- Patient legal counsel, including Vermont Legal Aid
 - Disability Rights Vermont
 - Authorized volunteers, including Vermont Psychiatric Survivors
 - Forensic psychiatrists under contract with the Department of Mental Health
 - Authorized Department of Mental Health employees
 - Authorized Attorney General's Office employees
 - Outside health care providers, including community mental health center employees
 - Authorized students and trainees

Pre-Approved Visitors will be required to sign in and sign out in Admissions, and will not be subject to additional screening. Sign in and sign out of Pre-Approved Visitors will be managed by Admissions staff.

Pre-Approved Visitors may be assisted with access to the secure residential and treatment area by non-nursing VSH employees.

Modifications to the list of Pre-Approved Visitors shall be made collaboratively by the VSH Executive Director with the Directors of Medicine, Nursing, and Social Work.

- J.** Sheriffs may proceed immediately to the secure residential and treatment area without the formal check-in process (*see VSH Weapons Policy: A27*). When sheriffs arrive, Admissions staff will notify the unit staff that sheriffs are proceeding to the secure residential and treatment area.
- K.** Visitors who are not on the Pre-Approved Visitor list shall be required by Check In staff to present a valid, photo identification before being granted access to the secure residential and treatment area. The Nursing Services Supervisor is authorized to waive the photo identification requirement when appropriate.

- L.** Check In staff shall record the date/time, name, address, and relationship to the patient in the Visitor Sign-In Log that will be kept in Admissions.
- M.** Check In staff will provide visitors with a Visitor's badge to be worn while on the premises. The badge will be returned upon departure.
- N.** Check In staff will review the Restricted Items List with the visitors and ask that any restricted items be left in Admissions (See *VSH Restricted Items and Search Policy: B27*). Check In staff may inspect any bag or item that is to be brought onto the secure residential and treatment area. Visitor's car keys and other small valuables may be placed in a lock box in the Admissions area. If Check In staff are uncertain about any item, questions shall be referred to the Nursing Services Supervisor.
- O.** All visitors will be scanned with a metal detector before being escorted to the secure residential and treatment area. The Nursing Services Supervisor is authorized to waive the scanning requirement when appropriate.
- P.** If visitors have items they intend to leave with a patient, Check In staff will inventory these items in accordance with *VSH Patient Personal Effects Policy: B21* and *VSH Nursing Procedure: Patient Property*. The inventory will occur in the Admissions area. Visitors may bring permitted items to the secure residential and treatment area for use during the visit (e.g. food, games, photos, etc.). It is not necessary to list food items on the Patient Property form. Food that is not consumed during the visit will be returned to the visitor unless approved by the treatment team (outside regular business hours, the physician on-call and the unit charge nurse represent the treatment team, and have the authority to make decisions regarding food).
- Q.** Before escorting visitors to the secure residential and treatment area, Check In staff will consult with the charge nurse or designee. Factors to consider may include, but not be limited to, patient acuity, unit acuity, and space availability. Every attempt will be made to allow for visitor access to patients. In some circumstances or in the event a visit has been delayed, the charge nurse or nursing services supervisor may extend the visit beyond regular visiting hours.
- R.** Following consultation with the charge nurse or designee, Check In staff will escort visitors to the secure residential and treatment area, bring them to the agreed upon room for visiting, and will notify the charge nurse of their arrival in the secure residential and treatment area.

Following completion of the Check In process, non-nursing VSH staff members may escort visitors from Admissions to the secure residential and treatment area, and may also escort visitors from the secure residential and treatment area to Admissions when they leave.

- S.** Upon completion of the visit, the charge nurse or designee will arrange escort off the secure residential and treatment area. Generally this will be accomplished by paging the Check In staff to request an escort off the unit. In the event, that Check In staff is not available to escort, the Charge Nurse may assign another staff person to escort the visitor to the Admissions area, where the staff person will collect the visitor badge, return to the visitor any personal belongings left there, and sign the visitor out. After notifying the charge nurse, non-nursing VSH employees may escort visitors from the secure residential and treatment area.
- T.** In the event that a visitor has come to VSH to meet with VSH staff members and/or participate in a family meeting, and will be going to the secure residential and treatment area, the visitor will be checked in as described above, prior to the meeting.

After the Check In process has been completed, the appropriate team member will be notified and will provide escort for the visitor. The VSH staff member will confer with the charge nurse upon entering and exiting the secure residential and treatment area with the visitor. If the VSH staff member leaves the secure residential and treatment area without the visitor, s/he will notify the charge nurse.